



July 23, 2026

Surrey City Council
13450 104 Avenue
Surrey, BC, V3T 1V8

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

Greetings from Semiahmoo Arts Society (SAS). SAS is a registered charity which has served as the arts council for the Semiahmoo Peninsula since 1974, and as the operators of the arts wing at South Surrey Recreation & Arts Centre (SSRAC) since 2014. **We are writing today to ask for your support.**

Over the years, SAS has significantly grown the services we provide to the community. Since assuming the operating role at SSRAC, we have expanded on our arts council activities that originally focused on supporting local practicing artists and fostering opportunities for artists to share their art with the community, to additionally include high quality, accessible art education programming open to everyone in the community.

In 2025, we delivered 227 classes, 40 workshops, 89 low-cost and free events, and 11 exhibitions. We employed 21 practicing local artists and art educators as instructors, and have partnerships with UNITI, Sources, Brella and Crescent Housing Society. We provide program subsidies for children, seniors, those living on a low-income and adults living with developmental disabilities. We have 4.5-5 star ratings on both Google and Facebook, and our City patron feedback is overwhelmingly positive. Our staff are inspired by the work they do. They possess a deep passion for the arts, and they recognize and value the significant mental health benefits and community connectedness that art fosters.

Here is where we need your support. SAS suffers from a long-standing dire lack of funding. In 2014, when the City contracted us as the operators of SSRAC's arts space it was done without the standard annual operational funding provided in similar agreements in the Lower Mainland. How this happened remains unclear, however the result is that SAS has significantly struggled financially for 12 years. We finished several years with large deficits, drained \$81K of our investment savings in the first two years of operation, have now had six Executive Directors, been routinely forced to lay off much-needed staff positions, and struggle to recruit and retain staff because we do not have sustained funding to offer secure employment. Staff routinely get burnt out because the requirements of their jobs are overwhelming. We have never had the funding to build and sustain the staff resources needed to flourish.

In recent years we have had little funding to invest in practicing local artists, a mandate which has been central to our arts council purpose for over 50 years. This is due to declining arts grant funding and because our limited resources are consumed by the costs of operating community civic arts programming on behalf of the City of Surrey.

Municipal arts programming is always operated at a loss. In all municipalities it requires tax dollar investment to offset costs because it costs more to provide than it earns. This is why standard municipal arts operating agreements include annual operational funds of approximately 40% of the organization's operating budget in addition to providing in-kind space (e.g. Port Moody, Coquitlam, White Rock,

Chilliwack - **see Appendix A**). These agreements have existed at least since the 1990s in our region. Surrey is the outlier in not meeting the standard. **SAS receives approximately 3% of our operational budget from the City of Surrey which explains our 12-year struggle.**

Unfortunately, without the support of the City of Surrey to help us with the cost of operations SAS will likely have to dissolve at the end of 2027 when our Peace Arch Hospital & Community Health Foundation (PAHCHF) seed grant finishes. In 2025 PAHCHF gave SAS a 3-year, \$100,000 a year grant, which saved us from bankruptcy; without it SAS will not be able to sustain even its current struggling staff complement. Dissolving as an organization will be heartbreaking for SAS, and a significant loss to the community. **With fair operational funding, however, SAS would finally be able to resource a sustainable operational function to support community programs and services, and build additional funding streams, thereby continuing to deliver arts services to the community at a value exceeding what the City could do on its own.**

The arts and art charities are essential to building and maintaining a healthy, thriving community. Currently less than 1%¹ of the City's \$10.7 million annual operating budget for Culture is invested into arts in South Surrey despite it being home to 16% of its population. The Surrey Arts Centre is a 30-40min drive away. Virtually all the City-funded cultural and arts events take place north of Hwy 10. **South Surrey's 111,000 residents deserve arts investment of their tax dollars close to home.**

City staff and SAS are currently working on a new operating agreement for the first time since the original 2014 agreement. **We are very hopeful for Council's support, and we will be sharing our story with the community with the hopes that they too will support our case.**

SAS presented to the City's Arts & Culture Committee on June 16, 2026, and we have applied to present as a delegation at the September 21 Regular Council Meeting, which is also the meeting where we hope that City staff will bring forward the proposed new operating agreement for Council's consideration. In the meantime, **please advise if we can count on your support.**

We look forward to your response. We would also welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the matter further. Please do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Semiahmoo Arts Society Board of Directors



Stephanie Beck, Chair



Michele Partridge, Vice-Chair



Lisa Geddes, Secretary & Treasurer



Scarlett Ballantyne, Director



Marisa Bonilla Contreras, Director



Dawn Robirtis, Director

¹ Includes arts funding only, specifically SSRAC/SAS, Crescent Beach Gallery, and cultural grants to South Surrey organizations. Does not include Totest Aleng which functions primarily as a private studio, nor Stewart Farm.

Appendix A: Regional Comparators to Semiahmoo Arts Society¹

Non-Profit Civic Arts Space Operator	Municipality/ Facility	Population ² (BC Stats, 2024)	2024 Operating Revenue/ Expenses	2024 Municipal Operating Grant	Grant as % of Total Operating Budget	Per Resident Annual Tax Investment
Chilliwack Arts & Cultural Centre Society	Operates Chilliwack Arts & Cultural Centre	114,952	\$2,199,709	\$882,000	41%	\$7.67
Place des Arts Society	Operates Place des Arts in Coquitlam	174,200	\$3,041,691	\$1,265,711	44%	\$7.27
White Rock Museum Society	Operates White Rock Museum	22,000	\$469,194	\$205,500	53%	\$9.34
Port Moody Arts Centre Society	Operates PoMo Arts Centre (almost identical service model to Semiahmoo Arts)	39,000	\$879,392	\$338,318	39%	\$8.66
Semiahmoo Arts Society	South Surrey (excludes White Rock =+22,000)	111,000 (16% of Surrey's population)	\$772,000	\$25,000	3%	.23 cents

¹ All comparators' agreements include in-kind use of the space and major facility maintenance and operational costs (with minor variance).

² [BC Population Estimates & Projections](#)